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**State will investigate pesticide case****A group presented proof that herbicides were found in the urine of residents in the Triangle Lake area**

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**BY SUSAN PALMER***The Register-Guard*Published: **Monday, Jun 13, 2011 05:01AM**

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TRIANGLE LAKE — State health officials have agreed to take a look at why two herbicides commonly used in forestry management have been found in the urine of dozens of Highway 36 corridor residents.

State Department of Agriculture spokesman Bruce Pokarney confirmed last week that Gov. John Kitzhaber has taken an interest in the issue, directing health officials who are part of the state's Pesticide Analytical Response Center to take the lead in studying the matter.

The effort comes in response to Triangle Lake area resident Day Owen and a group of activists called the Pitchfork Rebellion who have been agitating for more than seven years about the possibility that herbicides being aerially sprayed on nearby private forests may be drifting onto their land.

The group in the past has asked the state to investigate their concerns about herbicide drift. They have staged rallies and protests and attended meetings of government agencies, including the pesticide response board and the Oregon Board of Forestry. But it wasn't until an April meeting of the forestry board, at which the group presented proof of chemical exposure, that the state agreed to take a closer look. The board regulates logging and related practices on private timberlands in Oregon.

At that meeting, Dana Barr, a research professor at Emory University's Environmental and Occupational Health Department, told board members that she had found atrazine and 2,4-D — powerful herbicides — in the urine of all 21 residents who submitted samples to her lab. The samples were taken by a doctor, who forwarded them to the research lab.

When forestry board members asked Barr what the appropriate next step would be, she proposed a drift study, acknowledging that it's not clear exactly how residents are being exposed.

Since the April meeting, Owen said, another 13 area residents have been tested for exposure and all of them showed traces of the same two herbicides.

State officials aren't saying just how they'll do the study. In fact, they don't yet know how they'll pay for it. But they confirm that they expect to undertake a yearlong effort to examine the risk of exposure of area residents.

Department of Agriculture spokesman Pokarney couldn't say whether the study would require the cooperation of private forestland owners such as Weyerhaeuser that own land in the Lake Creek Watershed and often use the chemicals to kill weeds and brush and prevent them from crowding out tree seedlings.

Pokarney also couldn't say whether the residents or the water would be tested.

"The health division will take the lead role in designing a plan," Pokarney said. "But it's too early to discuss the exact components, and some of it is contingent on funding."

A governor's representative did not return a phone call asking about his interest in the issue, but Pokarney confirmed that the governor's office had been in communication with representatives of the Pesticide Analytical Response Center to make sure residents' concerns were being responded to.

"I would expect this to happen fairly soon. It's not something that's going to be put off to the end of the summer," Pokarney said.

There have been periodic disputes for years over the use of toxic herbicide sprays on private forestlands in Oregon, with the Pitchfork Rebellion emerging as perhaps the most persistent critic of the spraying.

Private forest landowners have said they need herbicides to ensure quick regrowth of Douglas fir and other tree crops on lands that have been logged. Landowners may face fines from the forestry board if their trees don't quickly achieve a "free to grow" height.

But, while herbicide label guidelines urge users to minimize pesticide drift, there are no state regulations requiring buffers near property boundaries between forested and nonforested lands. The state does have such pesticide buffer zones along fish-bearing streams, however.

Owen said he is taking some action now, but is disappointed he can't get more information about how Triangle Lake area residents may have been exposed.

The Department of Forestry requires private landowners to give the state advance notice when they plan to spray, but the state does not track which chemicals actually are sprayed. Timberland owners keep those records themselves. The state requires them to make the information available upon demand.

Pokarney did not know whether past records would be part of the current investigation.

When those details are finalized, the state will schedule public meetings, but the dates haven't been set, Pokarney said.

According to state records of pesticide use, atrazine and 2,4-D, were among the most common herbicides applied in Oregon 2008, the last year the state funded its reporting

program. On the list of the 100 most used pesticides, 2,4-D ranked seventh and atrazine 18th.

In the North Coast region that runs from just south of Dunes City north to Cannon Beach and encompasses the Coast Range, 2,4-D and atrazine were the second and third most used herbicides according to the state list.

But forestry uses of pesticide account for just 4 percent of the total amount used in Oregon.

Agriculture is by far the biggest user of pesticides, applying 77 percent of all the pesticides used in Oregon in 2008, state records show.

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